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Recommended Citation

Binkley, Sam and Jorge Capetillo-Ponce. "Foucault, Marxism and the Cuban Revolution: Historical and Contemporary Reflections." *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society* 20/3 (2008), pp. 437-451.

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Foucault, Marxism and the Cuban Revolution:
Historical and Contemporary Reflections

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Accepted for Publication in the journal *Rethinking Marxism*

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ABSTRACT:

This article relates central themes of Marxist and Foucauldian thought to the intellectual and political legacy of the Cuban Revolution. Against the backdrop of a reading of Foucault's relationship to the revolutionary left, it is argued that Marxist theoretical discourse on guerrilla struggle (as articulated by Mao, Guevara and others) provide an intriguing case for bio-political struggle. In the case of the Cuban revolution, an ethics of self-transformation appears in which new ways of living and practicing life are cultivated in opposition to sedimentations of state power. Moreover, in addition to this historical case, a discussion is offered of the reception of Foucault's work in contemporary Cuba, through an analysis of the published proceedings of a conference on Foucault held at the University of Havana in 1999. Here, Foucault's thought is appropriated as part of an effort to revitalize Cuban socialism itself.

Key words: Cuba, Foucault, Revolution, Bio-Politics, Cuban Revolution, Marxism, Socialist Vanguards, Ethics of Self

Foucault, Marxism and the Cuban Revolution: Historical and Contemporary Reflections

The guerrilla soldier should be an ascetic.
-- Che Guevara (43)

1. Introduction

Perhaps one of the most productive dialogues within critical theory has occurred between the theoretical camps associated with Foucault and Marx's radically differentiated approaches to questions of history, power and subjectivity. (Barrett 1991; Hunt 2004; Genel 2006) Recent efforts to understand these differences and reconcile their respective visions have provided fertile intellectual terrain for those engaged with a culturalist rethinking of the Marxist tradition. (Goldstein 2004; Sakolsky 1992; Milchman & Rosenberg 2002) In light of this, the aim of this essay is to extend this discussion, to broaden our understanding of the overlaps and antagonisms that define these theoretical fields and to tease out some complementarities that might define their combined use in the thinking through of contemporary issues of power, culture, subjectivity and social change. Moreover, the encounter we envision is one which takes place not just on the terrain of competing Marxist and Foucauldian ideas, but in the way these ideas are seen to collide with empirical, unfolding historical events — specifically, the events surrounding the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

The Revolution in Cuba, of course, is an event typically claimed and theorized by a Marxist tradition that evolved during the 20th century through Leninism and Maoism into a general theory of revolution. (Milios 1999) Indeed, perhaps it is precisely the heavy presence of such Marxist thought that has insulated the Cuban revolution from a wider theoretical examination, and specifically dissuaded Foucault himself from any public comment on Cuba, even as events there transfixed other intellectuals on the left. Yet by the same token, it is also because Marxist beliefs were being so aggressively put into practice in Cuba that the Cuban revolution presents itself as a promising historical case, an empirical meeting point, where Marxist and Foucauldian approaches might converge.

Toward this end, we will seek links between socialist concepts of revolution and Foucault's theorizations of "bio-power," as the power, not to extinguish life, but to administer it — to animate life from within. Twentieth century socialist revolutionary thought from Lenin to Guevara has argued the transformative significance of struggle itself, as an experience that fundamentally up-ends established ("bourgeois") worldviews, developing new critical potentials and, we will argue, enabling new ways of life. Similarly, formations of bio-power (as the power to condition life, to determine its specific form and direction, and to contain its possibilities), are vulnerable to challenges from below, in the form of bio-politics, wherein the terms of life itself are contested, its potentials reinvented, wrested from the ossifying institutions that contain it. In

what follows, it will be argued that a tradition of socialist revolutionary practice can be read through the lens of bio-power, that the thoughts and actions of Cuban revolutionaries (even as such practices espouse the rhetoric of a certain Marxism), can be understood as bio-political strategies, aimed at the interrogation of and remobilization of life itself.

But there is another purpose to which this study is directed. This paper seeks to open up discussion with scholars practicing in Cuba, for whom the thought of Foucault is heralded as a potentially revitalizing force in the intellectual and political traditions that have followed from the Cuban revolution — a potential resource both for the renewal of Cuban socialism’s critique of capitalism, and for a critique of the highly sedimented and institutionalized forms to which the Cuban socialist project is currently consigned. After offering our scenario for a Foucauldian encounter with the Cuban revolution, we will comment on the Cuban reception of Foucauldian thought, as contained in a volume titled *Inicios de Partida* (translated as “Initial Departures”), published in 2000 by the Juan Marinello Center for Research and Development of Cuban Culture and the Antonio Gramsci Program at University of Havana. The volume contains proceedings from the first and only public conference in Cuba on the work of Foucault.

2. The Ethics of Revolution: Foucault in Cuba

At various moments in his life, Foucault sought philosophical meaning in the struggles of radical movements and revolutionary experiences, often for reasons that far outstripped the explicit ideological premises of these movements themselves. In Iran, Poland, Tunisia and in his work with the French prison movement, Foucault aligned himself with insurgent or reformist groups, lending critical firepower to their causes while gathering lessons and experiences that would feed back into his overall thought. (Eribon 1991: 281-295) But Foucault never visited Cuba, nor did he offer (to our knowledge) more than a passing reference to it in his comments and writings. The reasons for this lack of engagement are no doubt symptomatic of his deeply ambivalent relationship with Marxism and the left, expressed in his deep seated antipathy to the French Communist Party and what he described in an interview with the Italian Marxist Duccio Trombadori (later published as *Remarks on Marx*) as the “hyper-Marxism” of the student movements of 1968. (Foucault 1991: 138) Such left political vanguards, Foucault charged, assumed a mediating authority in the revolutionary process, which masked their role in the reproduction of juridical norms and ultimately the reinstitutionalization of power relations. (Foucault 1980) This does not mean that Foucault saw no value in revolutionary processes themselves: Foucault, the revolutionary, preferred the “absolutely collective will” he observed in the mass uprisings in Tehran, whose mobilizations were without revolutionary parties and militant factions in any conventional sense of the term. (Afaray & Anderson 2005: 253)

Indeed, it is possible to imagine that a Foucauldian reading of the Cuban revolution might follow a similar path to the one he took in Iran, centering on the modes of subjectivity and practices of radical self fashioning enabled in the revolutionary process. Such revolutionary movements, for Foucault, proposed a radical subjective transformation defined by an intensity and inventiveness resulting from both a confrontation with dominant structures of power and profound individual encounter with sedimented, everyday modes of existence. As Foucault describes it, revolutions bring about personal change by grasping “mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and affecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds” (Foucault 1978: 96).

Moreover, these revolutionary transformations, at their most heated intensities, were actualized through a willingness to contest the boundaries of “life,” as a political deployment, through the risk death — a threshold which renewed personal authenticity through an encounter with the limits of bio-power. Death, as a limit to power that holds the potential for a renewal of experience and selfhood, was central to Foucault’s comments on the Iranian revolution — a theme which runs to the heart of many revolutionary narratives of personal and social transformation, wherein vanguards develop into cults of martyrdom as they risk death in pursuit of political goals.

Yet any effort to tie together Foucault's thesis on bio-political struggle with a socialist revolutionary program must first reconcile Foucault's specific distaste for Marxist revolutionary politics itself. This is made clear in his discussion with a group of French Maoists, published in *Les Temps Modernes* as "On Popular Justice." To the proposal from Maoist militants that a people's court be established in France to judge the French police, Foucault expressed ambivalence, asserting that the court as an instrument of popular justice functions instead to retard the process of what might be considered an act of popular justice itself, "re-inscribing it within institutions which are typical of a state apparatus" (Foucault 1980: 1).

Foucault goes on to extend this critique to the radical fraction advocated most vehemently by the Maoists for the purpose of revolutionary struggle: the People's Red Army. The Red Army represented a vanguard group, disciplined and organized, whose function it was to reign in the revolutionary energies of the masses — whose opposition to domination would otherwise remain dispersed and unconcentrated — under a provisional state apparatus capable of facilitating a transition to communism through an intermediary stage, a "dictatorship of the proletariat." The Red Army were necessary in order that "there be some legal authority so that the diverse acts of vengeance should be in conformity with law, with a people's law." (Foucault 1980: 2) Foucault, however, is explicit in his opposition to the interventions of such third parties in the direct expression of an act of popular, revolutionary justice, as actions that are "not

backed up by a state apparatus which has the power to enforce their decisions, they purely and simply carry them out.” (Foucault 1980: 9) Such a conception of popular justice as an unmediated act of retribution between dominant and oppressed groups runs directly against the role of the revolutionary vanguard, whose significance is first theorized by Lenin, and later by others constituting the socialist revolutionary canon from Mao to Guevara and Võ Nguyên Giáp, commander of the People’s Army of Vietnam.

However, we should not conclude from this that Foucault was uninterested in socialist vanguard groups per se, or that he saw no value in their efforts. Indeed, Foucault was at times effusive about the revolutionary process itself as one with rich ethical implications, as evidenced in his comments on the student movement he witnessed in 1968 in Tunisia, where he taught philosophy at the University of Tunis. During his stay of almost two years, Foucault became aligned with a mobilization of leftist students whose increasing radicalism came to a boil with the events of the Six Day War in 1967. Combining pan-Arabism with Trotskyite and Maoist sentiments, these students impressed upon Foucault the depth and conviction of their revolutionary purpose. (Eribon: 187-198). But more than anything else, it was the intensity of their devotion to their purpose, to the point of risking death, that drew him in. Foucault praised the “possibility of an absolute sacrifice” that he observed, which reflected the “existential, I should say physical, commitment” of the students willing to risk their lives. (Foucault 1991:136-7)

These themes were to come to the fore of Foucault's thinking on revolutionary movements ten years later, in his coverage of the Iranian revolution. In journalistic reports he expressed his enthusiasm for the broad mass of participants in the revolutionary effort who, like the Tunisian students, seemed to operate without the direction of a political vanguard of any sort, responding directly, physically and with their own lives to the concrete conditions of oppression they experienced on a daily basis. Indeed, for Foucault, the uprisings in Iran signified a political will, which was at once a political spirituality — one that sought as its target the entire texture of modern life, and with it a transformation of subjectivity as such.

In rising up the Iranians said to themselves — and this is perhaps the soul of the uprising: 'Of course, we have to change this regime... But, above all, we have to change ourselves. Our way of being, our relationship with others, with things, with eternity, with God etc., must be completely changed, and there will only be a true revolution if this radical change in our experience takes place...' there was the desire to renew their entire existence by going back to a spiritual experience that they thought they could find within Shi'ite Islam itself. (Foucault 2005: 255)

The insights Foucault drew from this encounter hold potential for a richer understanding of the dynamics of revolutionary movements generally, and for a better understanding of their implications for a politics of life. As we shall see, socialist vanguards of the sort that drove the Cuban revolution to such heights contained powerful visions of transformed ways of life, and of the challenge to "renew one's entire existence."

3. The Renewal of Life in the Cuban Revolution

Such a political mobilization of life forces and a radical will to interrogate and reinvent subjective modes of existence (even at the risk of revolutionary martyrdom), is most readily apparent among those core members of the guerrilla army who later fill the offices of state — figures who ultimately project themselves and their experiences of transformation as exemplary of the modes of citizenship in new socialist society. These figures composed the vanguard of the revolutionary movement, typified in the character of the Castro brothers, Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and others claiming normative authority over the direction of revolutionary change, and the right to shape and discipline its form according to the precepts of socialist theory.

While Foucault's criticism of such normative vanguards (and of the oppressive state institutions they established) was relentless, it is nonetheless possible to read the significance of this vanguard group against the grain of their own legitimizing discourse, to inquire into the forms of resistance they mobilized and the new forms of life they made possible. This potential can be grasped when read against the backdrop of a tradition of Marxist-Leninist thought on the role of political vanguards in facilitating a general revolutionary transformation of society. This is not to suggest any internal agreement between Foucauldian theory and revolutionary socialist theory: it is to suggest that the latter be viewed through the lens of the former, that socialist revolutionary thought and practice

be considered for the ways in which it functioned discursively and actually, and for the fields of life it mobilized and the modes of existence it proposed.

This tradition begins with the Marxist-Leninist framing of the role of the vanguard in the revolutionary process. In the pages of *What is to be Done?*, Lenin spelled out the limitations that beset workers parties in their efforts to operate beyond the narrow aims of trade unionism, and the need for political vanguards, that is, small circles of intellectuals possessing a unique revolutionary consciousness. (Lenin 1961) Lenin famously advocated for the disciplined control of a vanguardist circle, whose aim was not only to mobilize radical forces and direct them toward the destabilization of the state, but to educate the masses, and to affect changes in their own consciousness, stripping away moribund bourgeois ideologies not only among their ranks but ultimately among the proletariat and the population at large.

This thread was taken up by Mao in his statements on the “people’s war” which provided a set of revolutionary strategies adapted for the conditions of a pre-industrial population, concentrating on the mobilization of peasant forces by a guerrilla vanguard through a series of hit-and-run tactics conducted in the countryside against a centralized, regular army (Tse Tung 1961). For this reason, guerrillas, since they could not be mobilized, directed or controlled through a centralized party structure, had to bear within themselves a powerful ideological investment and an intense relation of self-control and self-discipline. This way of life was modeled in many ways on conventional techniques of military

discipline, although discipline itself was adapted, appropriated, and reconfigured in ways far surpassing the instrumental aims of military regulation to affect a more profound transformation in subjectivity and personal existence. Specifically, the conduct of a people's war enacted two radical breaks from traditional regimes of military discipline: first, victory was to be achieved through a struggle that was protracted and extensive (a way of life) allowing guerrilla forces to disseminate their influence through the gradual infiltration of the popular social fabric, and, simultaneously, the slow erosion of the will of the government forces. Guerrilla struggle was, in this way, fundamentally distinct from the heroism typically attached to military operations because it was waged through a sustained and autonomous practice, adopted, improvised and mobilized against the enemy by a guerrilla fighter whose battle was both internal and external (Tse Tung 2000).

Second, the guerrillas of the people's war were to become deft magicians in the arts of tactical conflict, improvising from scratch, on the basis of extensive knowledge of the environment, ways of fighting that the trained and highly centralized forces of the regular army could not anticipate. A way of life, a technique of selfhood and a method of warfare were, in this regard, integrated in a mutually constituting totality in which the cultivation of new vitalities and new forces within the self was undertaken in ways that far surpassed the disciplinary techniques of traditional military training in their inventiveness and intensity. In other words, the bio-political regulation of military life was transformed in the

hands of the people's army — a process which combined personal transformation with the willed encounter with death. And guerrilla struggle was itself an experience of subjective renewal: the guerrillas, recruited from the urban ranks of radical intellectuals were to become skilled operators in rural environments, acquainting themselves with local ways of life in these regional contexts, and drawing from stocks of local knowledge to devise their battle tactics. Indeed, fostering bonds with peasants was part of a process of ideological development to which guerrillas were required to submit themselves in order that they evolve the conviction and proper ethical form demanded of revolutionary struggle, but also to gain the moral and political orientation demanded of them after they assumed positions of power in the new government.

Guerrillas, revolutionaries in agrarian societies, were urban instruments of the peasant classes, transformed by their experiences in rural areas and their deep immersion in the lives of peasant workers — in the rhythms of their days, in the patterns of their habits and leisure, and in their specific modes of life. In other words, Mao's view of the political vanguard as a guerrilla insurgency propelling a people's war was characterized not just by its strategies of political mobilization, but by the mobilization of a special kind of ethical type, a practitioner of a new form of life who lives among the peasants, in Mao's famous phrase, "as a fish moves through water," drawing sustenance and life from them for the purposes of struggle, but also transforming himself in the course.

The Cuban revolution, which did not begin as a socialist movement, retained deep strains of nationalist sentiment which, together with its operational base in the countryside mandated a powerful linkage between the guerrilla soldier, the rural landscape, and the agrarian economic network itself. Indeed, the July 26 Movement that propelled Castro and his guerrilla force to power in 1959 related a powerful narrative of its own techniques of struggle, which included a rich mythology of the guerrilla type as an ethical tactician, one possessing an array of tricks and skills for use in daily life in tactical ways, but also a deep ethical disposition capable of heroic feats of self sacrifice, of rich empathic bonds with peasants and other members of oppressed fractions, and of deep selflessness and solidarity in the struggles of everyday existence, even (and especially) in the face of death. Such ethical predispositions, incubated in the guerrilla encampments in the Sierra Maestra mountains, and in the hit-and-run campaign against Batista's superior military forces, spelled out a new kind of revolutionary self and ultimately a renewed form of life. What Guevara would describe as the "socialist man in Cuba" was one that underwent a significant transformation in the way he understood and practiced his own life, partly as a fact of historical destiny and partly through a self-imposed program of ethical self-work (Guevara 2005). This new man was cultivated in struggle, later refashioned for the purposes of revolutionary government, and finally generalized and exported broadly to the wider population as the proper form for an invigorated Cuban citizenry in which every citizen was herself a

revolutionary in myriad everyday practices, choices and behaviors. In Guevara's words:

The guerrilla fighter, as a person conscious of a role in the vanguard of the people, must have a moral conduct that shows him to be a true priest of the reform to which he aspires. To the stoicism imposed by the difficult conditions of warfare should be added an austerity born of rigid self-control that will prevent a single excess, a single slip, whatever the circumstances. The guerrilla soldier should be an ascetic. (Guevara, 1961: 43)

Indeed, Guevara theorized the development of the inner life of the revolutionary as a process of personal transformation, which was at once a practice of intentional self-development and self-work, albeit one directed at times by members of the vanguard group, for whom the change is already more concretely realized. In Cuban revolutionary discourse, this project was defined in terms of the spirit for collective, cooperative work undertaken by the individual — a capacity which had to be worked on, shaped and developed in specific ways. Guevara writes:

I think the place to start is to recognize the individual's quality of incompleteness, of being an unfinished product. The vestiges of the past are brought into the present in one's consciousness, and a continual labor is necessary to eradicate them. The process is two-sided. On the one hand, society acts through direct and indirect education; on the other, the individual submits to a conscious process of self-education. (Guevara, 2005: 203)

For the Cuban revolutionary, such continual labor was contingent upon the active contributions of the individual, in her work on society and on herself. "In this period of the building of socialism" Guevara writes, "we can see the new

man and woman being born.” Indeed, the socialist state is so invested in the development and dissemination of such a mode of livelihood as to compare itself to a large scale educational enterprise: “Society as a whole must be converted into a gigantic school.”

Education takes hold among the masses and the foreseen new attitude tends to become a habit. The masses continue to make it their own and to influence those who have not yet educated themselves. This is the indirect form of educating the masses, as powerful as the other, structured, one (Guevara, 2005: 206)

This proposal for a Foucauldian reading of the role of the vanguard revolutionary party as tacticians in the bio-political struggle (speculative and partial as it is), allows us to consider the relationship between certain Foucauldian and Marxian themes, in the light of a specific historical event. However, to advance this aim, let us now turn from Cuba’s history to contemporary Cuban scholarship on Foucault, and to the relation of Foucault to existing Cuban socialist thought.

4. Foucault and Marxism: A Cuban Synthesis?

How has Foucault’s legacy been received in Cuba? Our reflection on the Cuban reception of Foucault is admittedly non-comprehensive and partial, focusing as it does on one document — the edited proceedings from a conference held in September 1999 at the University of Havana, published the following year as *Inicios de Partida* or “Initial Departures.” In the collection’s introduction, some light is shed on the limited and constraining conditions under which

Cuban scholars began to read Foucault: “it was very difficult to get a hold of any work by Foucault in Cuba... until the first part of the 1980s,” when Foucault’s works began to be read with “certain systematization,” but “almost clandestinely, at the margins of institutional programs” (Inicios de Partida 2000:37). Indeed, the conference organizers admit that “there are no Foucault specialists in Cuba,” only a few scholars “who deal with Foucault’s work” (Inicios de Partida 2000:131), as such a specialization would require a familiarity with the French intellectual atmosphere of the postwar milieu that Cuban scholars, largely isolated from academic exchanges with Western universities since the 1960’s, do not possess. Yet through informal channels, the editors tell us, Foucault’s works began to circulate. Some of the Cuban scholars recount getting a hold of some “wrinkled photocopies” of Foucault’s texts “that went from hand to hand and began to circulate among professors and advanced students at the Instituto Superior de Arte, at that time a sort of theoretical vanguard in Havana, and in the Schools of Arts and Literature, and of Philosophy and History at University of Havana” (Inicios de Partida 2000: 36-37)

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In this regard, the Cuban reception of Foucault has been both constrained and scattershot: largely developed outside of (and at times against) the academic mainstream in that country. However, there is a significant thread woven through the proceedings from the 1999 conference, which coalesces on an expression of hope, shared by all of the participants, that an engagement with the

work of Foucault might help to integrate the Cuban academic scene into a global dialogue on the left, to end its isolation and to repair the reputation once held by the University of Havana in such dialogues, "which has a much diminished role from the one it had forty, fifty, or even sixty years ago" (Inicios de Partida 2000:220) Participants in the conference were largely faculty in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Havana, where Marxian theories predominate. Indeed, the book's introduction puts forth the aims of the conference: "our interest in Foucault does not represent a way of drifting away from Marxism," state the organizers; in fact "the thinking of Marx and Foucault share many things, but one is central: both are thoughts for combat, polemic thoughts." Thus, even as the essays are described as "initial departures," they nonetheless share a common aim: to "appropriate the critical and revolutionary aspects of Foucault's thinking," and to rescue the "subversive," "revolutionary" Foucault "from the deformations that his work has undergone from the right and the dilettantes, and put it in service of the revolutionary Marxist left" (Inicios de Partida 2000: 6-7).

Toward this end, the organization of the published proceedings echoes the format of the conference: two panels are separated by a keynote address, the first of which is "The Challenge of Historiography: Archaeology and Genealogy," and the second "Reason, Subject, Humanism: What is to be Critiqued?," with a keynote speech by Jorge Luis Acanda Gonzalez entitled "From Marx to Foucault: Power and Revolution." Of the six papers included on these panels, most reflect

topics not unfamiliar to Foucault scholars in the West, although they are presented here with an aim and an urgency that stems directly from the Cuban predicament. Among them are Maria del Pilar Diaz Castañón's "Foucault and the Chimera of Origin" which examines the "subversive" Foucault who "rejects the classical premises of the history of ideas"; Lohania Aruca's "Reflections on the Foucault effect and the History of Cuba" describes the radical potential of Foucault's genealogical method and his concept of "subjugated knowledges," and Paul Ravelo's "Michel Foucault: Descentered Epistemology and Psychoanalysis of Modern Subjectivity," which brings together psychoanalytic theory with Foucault's genealogy of the subject.

Among these varied contributions are reflected several currents which, at first blush, share no clear consensus on Foucault's relevance to Cuban socialism. Yet, it seems clear that two general concerns color the arguments put forward. First is the desire to update the Marxism that has shaped Cuban socialism with a more developed cultural receptiveness, not unlike the "cultural turn" that reshaped various Western Marxisms in the latter third of the 20th century, or perhaps with a nod to the vision of a "socialism with a human face" that anticipated the events of the Prague Spring in 1968. In this collection, this program is largely pursued through a rethinking of the work of Antonio Gramsci along specifically Foucauldian lines, in an effort to coax Marxism away from explicit economic determinism, and the highly institutionalized state forms to which such theories have consigned much socialist revolutionary thought and

practice, toward a greater attention to everyday life practices as the sites of resistances, interventions and opposition. (Laclau & Mouffe 1989) A second concern is found in the more explicit undertaking aimed at a theorization of revolutionary praxis as an active vital practice of social and subjective (a theme developed in the first part of this essay), capable of mobilizing new modes of subjectivity against the institutionalized and petrified forms of power institutionalized in the Cuban socialist state. We will discuss these two tendencies in turn.

Authors included in *Inicios de Partida* strain to link the revolutionary contributions of Foucault with Marxist thought. As a support for this assertion, several authors make reference to Foucault's phrase: "Frequently I summon phrases, concepts, texts from Marx, but without feeling obliged to give the small identifying piece that goes with a citation from Marx... I summon Marx without saying I am, without putting him between inverted commas." (*Inicios de Partida* 2000:14; Foucault 1978:100) Yet such a rescuing of the radical Foucault entails, among other things, an interrogation of the limits of Marxian theories, most apparently in an expansion of the empirical domain in which power relations are perceived to take place, from the institutions of state and civil society to multiple sites which extend to the body and everyday life. In this regard, Foucault's ideas are seen as working against the codification of revolutionary impulses and the petrification of social power to which Marxian theories and their attendant state institutions have, in the Cuban context, largely fallen prey.

Toward this end, Marial Iglesias calls for a “political economy of the body,” drawing on what is perceived to be a new conception of power developed by Foucault as a strategic and relational form, whose effects of domination go beyond those traditional places in which power is studied in Cuba: state institutions, repressive apparatuses, justice courts and so on, and extend it to inscriptions of power on everyday practices, “a fine network of relations, always tense and changing, that permeate each aspect of social life, even in the most intimate corners of life, such as the body and sexuality” (Inicios de Partida 2000:34). Similarly, such an extension of the domain of the political is seized by other authors for its critical potential: Foucault’s emphasis on subjugated knowledges, one author writes, “allows people to learn to think and question things that are generally considered unquestionable,” thus holding great potential in refocusing Cuban revolutionary efforts towards the transformation of everyday practice: “the everyday existence of common people, the world of material objects around them, and the diverse forms of perceiving and imagining their world” (Inicios de Partida 2000:35). A Marxism that is dislodged from economic determinist models, in which the nuances of culture are interpreted as sites both of domination and resistance, parallels efforts in Western Marxism to expand Marxist categories to address daily life more generally, and to affect a de-regidification of socialist institutions, from vanguard parties to state apparatuses.

Indeed, while this discussion of Foucault’s work strains to remain within a clearly recognizable Marxist framework, many authors, while only implicitly or

between the lines, agree with Foucault's rejection of the Marxism of parties as "that sclerotic, reformist, and bureaucratized left which had reduced the complex and critical Marxist discourse into a group of empty formulas and slogans." They understand that a socialist renovation fashioned on the original Cuban revolutionary spirit requires a new attention to everyday practices, and to the special kinds of ethical life and practices of self-formation that are not present in today's ossified Cuban society. In this sense, the Cuban incorporation of Foucault into a socialist framework comprises the alignment of his work, and even his own position as an intellectual, with the working class and other subjugated groups and against the bourgeoisie. This effort embraces the possibility of intellectuals or experts enhancing and transforming the lives of others, and working against the solidification of power.

Indeed, the thrust of this effort reflects trends within Western Marxism toward a cultural rethinking of economic deterministic models, and toward a broader definition of social life. As in Western Marxism, a significant stage in this shift comes with the work of Antonio Gramsci — a figure with whom Cubans are well familiar. By and large, Cuban scholars consider Gramsci's understanding of power as hegemony as inaugurating a new perspective on the reflection of everyday practices of subject-formation, even though they also recognize that his new "challenge to Marxist intellectuals regarding how hegemony was exercised was not taken seriously by the theoretical apparatuses of the institutionalized Marxist movement" (Inicios de Partida 2000: 89).

Foucault, just as Gramsci did decades before, alerts us of the diffuse character of the networks of relations that produce domination. For both Foucault and Gramsci, power is not “something imposed from above, instead it is something that is produced and reproduced in the interstices of everyday life.”² Or as Acanda puts it, “it is not a straitjacket imposed upon society to regulate what it produces; from the start society and power interact producing one another,” and thus “the construction of subjectivity is not a free, spontaneous process” (Inicios de Partida 2000: 91). Indeed, another fruitful similarity is that Gramsci’s notion of the formation of hegemony and common sense can be connected to Foucault’s “politics of truth” and to his idea that different types of revolution can occur because:

[T]he state consists of the codification of a number of power relations that make possible its functioning . . . Revolution means a different type of recodification of the same relations. This implies that there are very different classes of revolution. There are as many types as there are possible recodifications of the power relations, and one can perfectly conceive revolutions that leave essentially untouched the relations of power that form the bases of the functioning of the state” (Inicios de Partida 2000: 94; Foucault 1980:122-123).

This notion has the potential — and the Cuban scholars are aware of this — to expand into a critique of practices and processes that, while revolutionary in name, serve to de-mobilize the revolutionary project itself. This leads directly to a critique of the trajectory of the Cuban revolution from its auspicious beginnings in the early 1960s to the cumbersome administrative form it currently inhabits, and give a new meaning to the notion that revolution is the renewal of life. Foucault’s revealing of the essence of the “politics of truth” of the capitalist

system as the basis upon which its dominance survives, allows the Cubans to reflect upon the possibility of eliminating capitalist domination, which “implies the radical subversion of its ‘politics of truth,’ and the creation of another essentially different one” (Inicios de Partida 2000: 92) Or as Acanda puts it, “the question is not getting rid of power altogether (a chimera, since truth is power),” but to “separate power from truth in the social, economic, and cultural forms that come together to constitute hegemony.” Here again Acanda connects Gramsci’s concept of hegemony with Foucault’s assertion that “the problem is not to change the conscience of the people but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (Inicios de Partida 2000: 93; Foucault 1980:133).

In short, there is a tendency within these works to bring together elements from Gramsci and his concept of “hegemony” with Foucauldian concepts of the “politics of truth” — a linkage that, the Cubans believe, can help establish a new basis for the creation of truly revolutionary subjectivities. Indeed, the Cuban scholars in *Inicios de Partida* believe that the Gramsci-Foucault connection will create a fresh critique not just of state socialist institutions where self-forming capacities of revolutionary praxis are codified and arrested, but of global forms of capitalist domination. Acanda even talks of a Gramscian-Foucauldian synthesis that “will enhance our understanding of the significance of the popular, collective, and democratic exercise of micro-powers; the decentralization and socialization of power; and the need to reconstruct identities in accordance with a new liberating and de-alienating process which

implies the development of a new and imaginative theory for the construction of a pluricentric and truly democratic socialism, one in the purest tradition of our revolution” (Inicios de Partida 2000: 112-113). Indeed, it is with Acanda that we find the most explicit expression of the second theme mentioned earlier: a specifically Cuban appropriation of Foucauldian themes for a renewal of the transformative potential of revolutionary praxis.

There is no question that the statement that engages most forcefully in *Inicios de Partida* is that of the keynote address, given by Jorge Acanda, which is notable for its vision of a radical politics of everyday transformations linking Cuban socialism with Foucault. For Acanda, Foucault’s critique of capitalist society from its implicit linkage of formations of knowledge/power is relevant to a tradition of social theory framed by the Cuban revolutionary experience. Such a critique is not limited to a reflection on power in the abstract sense, but selects as its purpose the aim to “reveal the essential political/rational elements in modern capitalist society, and underline its effects over the processes of subject-formation in individuals as a first step toward the construction of strategic knowledge.” In fact, he argues that Foucault’s understanding of the base on which political rationality stands can work against the incorporation of the transformative force of revolutionary change (what we earlier described as the bio-political strategies of the Cuban revolution) into the dominant structures of power, or, as he puts it, to limit the process by which “new forms, spaces and agents of the revolution end up being assimilated and neutralized by the same

power that they are struggling against.” This focus on the power struggle over the definition of everyday life has great potential to regenerate Marxism in Cuba, Acanda argues, because Marxism is a theoretical canon that has “not developed adequate conceptual structures to analyze these struggles and their outcomes” (Inicios de Partida 2000:87). Because Foucault asserted that disciplinary societies perpetuate themselves through power relations that exert their influence on all the social body, and expose the nexus between forms of knowledge, disciplinary techniques, and economic relations, his theory, according to Acanda, “should be appropriated by the revolution” since “it allows for a necessary critique, from the revolutionary left, of the dogmatic and economistic Marxism, because the positivist and instrumental conception of Marxism simply changed the people working in state structures but in many cases kept the vertical, repressive, authoritarian functioning logic of those structures”(Inicios de Partida 2000: 88), thus blocking the emergence of new forms of life defined by a creative confrontation with both dominant power structures and everyday modes of existence.

In short, for Acanda, as for the other Cuban scholars in *Inicios de Partida*, Foucault’s explorations of self-work and self-transformation through the “essential character of ‘micro-powers’ constitutes an inescapable theoretical base for the further development of Marxist political theory” (Inicios de Partida 2000:90). Further, Foucault’s work reveals that power mechanisms have their own dynamics, “and if we don’t try to construct another type of power, one that

avoids domination, exploitation, subordination and asymmetry, then the liberating essence of the [Cuban] revolution will disappear.” Here Acanda is again underlining the importance of Foucault’s work for those interested in the renewal of the Cuban revolution by creating a situation where a different, non-dominating, type of power prevails: “a critical and rational regime of truth capable of producing the free development and creation of subjectivities” (Inicios de Partida 2000:110-111). This implies a transformation of subjectivity as much as a change in institutionalized political forms.

5. Conclusion

A Foucauldian insight into the dynamics of the Cuban revolution, one fashioned speculatively from the history of Foucault’s encounters with radical movements, and one drawn from ongoing debates among Cuban Foucault scholars, has many elements to forge an opening for a wider dialogue on Foucault and Cuban revolutionary social thought. We have sought, in the preceding pages, to accomplish to provoke a critical encounter between Foucauldian and Marxian thought around the events of the Cuban revolution. Our aim was twofold: first, to enable a rethinking of the role of revolutionary vanguards through the concept of bio-power and bio-politics; and second to link these insights with current debates within Cuban intellectual discourse on the potential for Foucault’s thought to reinvigorate Cuban socialism in the context of its current predicament. In either case, we have chosen to highlight those

features of Foucault's work that concentrate on the transformative powers of revolution, which serve to open new thresholds for the reconfiguration of subjectivity in new practices of life.

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¹ The most prominent works read at that time, according to one of the participants, Marial Iglesias, were *Archeology of Knowledge*, *Discipline and Punish*, *the History of Sexuality*, and a bit later, the compilation of articles called *Microphysics of Power*. In 1993 the Argentinean professor Susana Paponi gave a course in the School of Philosophy and History of the University of Havana entitled "Foucault and Postmodernism," which contributed, according to Iglesias, to intensify the debate around his work inside Cuba. Finally she mentions that the inclusion of Foucault in the program of contemporary philosophy was due to the interest of Professor Paul Ravelo, a participant in the conference and a collaborator in *Inicios de Partida*. In the

area of history, however, Foucault is absent, with students graduating without having read his work or only at the margins of the institution. According to Iglesias, there are only a handful of works in Cuba that maintain a relation with Foucault's methodology. One is by Adrian Lopez on the cholera in XIX-century Cuba.” Other young researchers mentioned by Iglesias that have been influenced in some degree by the work of Foucault are Ricardo Quizá, Manuel Barcia, and Pablo Riaño (Inicios de Partida 2000: 36-37).

² It is important to underline, however, that Acanda and other Cuban scholars assert that Gramsci understood that while power is in all places, it is not in the same shape or quantity, in contrast to Foucault who considered power unquantifiable. Acanda relies here on Poulantzas, who stated that “the reformulation of the concept of power in a relational sense only acquires its full meaning when we understand those relations as class relations.” In other words, Poulantzas and the Cuban scholars argue that Gramsci understood better than Foucault the fact that not all individuals incorporate power in the same manner and/or the same quantity (Inicios de Partida 2000: 107-109).